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Lehigh Valley roads

From The Morning Call -- September 28, 2004

Officials commit \$1.1 million to fix sinkhole problem

Valley Transportation Study to help pay for lining Bushkill Creek.

By Matt Assad
Of The Morning Call

The Lehigh Valley Transportation Study set aside \$1.1 million on Monday to help fix the Cement Belt sinkhole problem by lining a section of the Bushkill Creek near Stockertown.

But residents who oppose the stream-lining project need not panic — at least not yet — because the state is still trying to decide whether to approve the plan.

The state Department of Transportation, Hercules Cement and the Army Corps of Engineers proposed a plan last week to line 850 feet of Bushkill Creek, near Stockertown, to prevent water from the creek and the Hercules Cement quarry upstream from filtering into the ground causing sinkholes.

Sinkholes in that area have collapsed the northbound bridge on Route 33, threatened the southbound bridge and damaged several private properties in the area.

"We're just putting the money aside so it will be there if we decide to do this," said assistant district engineer. "It's there if we need it, but whether we'll need it is yet to be determined."

That's good news for Linda Iudicello, a Palmer Township resident living downstream of the proposed lining project.

As a resident of the Brookwood Development, Iudicello is not eager to see a stream-lining project she fears will only carry more water to her neighborhood and create more sinkholes that have swallowed the property of two neighbors.

"We just want more study about this before anything is done," Iudicello said. "This is just dumping all the water at the end of the liner, and that's where we live."

The sinkhole plan, being reviewed by the state Department of Environmental Protection and the Army Corps of Engineers, calls for Hercules and PennDOT to jointly line 850 feet of the creek to the state-owned land around the Route 33 bridges, with a synthetic material.

The state hopes the plastic membrane will stop creek water from draining into the ground causing sinkholes, which began opening in 2000 when a Palmer Township family was forced to leave its home and the small Stockertown-Tatamy bridge was swallowed.

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The lining would then reduce the amount of creek water flowing underground through and into the quarry, which only dumps the water back into the stream.

Theoretically, the liner would carry the water far enough away so that it would drain the quarry.

However, state and federal officials may commission a study to determine how far it goes downstream to effectively carry the water away.

The Lehigh Valley Transportation Study on Monday set aside \$1.1 million of Valley transportation funds for the lining project, and the Army Corps of Engineers probably would have to spend \$3 million to \$4 million to complete its portion, Lerch said.

Lerch said PennDOT officials had hoped to decide on whether to line the creek by November. He said properly studying the issue could push the decision into next year.

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